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Identifiers-Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation

The major article in this IRCD Bulletin is devoted to preschool educational programs. Following some background discussion about the new concentration in preschool education on cognitive development and the rationale for preschool learning, various techniques and procedures are reported. An extensive bibliography cites works about preschool programs for disadvantaged youngsters. There is also a brief article on socially disadvantaged child and a note about the book, Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation, by Bloom, Davis, and Hess (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965, 179 pp.). (NH)

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Volume I, Number 2 March, 1965

THE CONCEPT: "SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILD"

The term "culturally deprived child," which was prevalent in the field several years ago, is coming to be supplanted by "socially disadvantaged child" and related variants. (Some writers advocate "culturally different child.") Several considerations help to delineate this concept.

In the first place, "culture"--as social scientists use the term--is a universal attribute of all social groupings; and variations among cultures cannot properly be interpreted as differences in "amount" or in "worth," but only as differences in kind. No child is "deprived" of a culture.

Second, although all groups in our society share to some extent in the pre-

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PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

During the next few months it is anticipated that several hundred programs of education for children aged three to six will be initiated in the United States. These programs, which have been called "pre-school," will be directed toward providing children from socially disadvantaged families with an earlier introduction to formal education. Whether they are nine-month long programs providing a full school year of pre-school experience or eight-week summer projects such as those which will be financed by "Project Headstart" this summer, all these programs are based upon the same underlying assumptions:

1) That these children have not had many of the experiences usually associated with readiness for the traditional demands

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A NEW RESOURCE

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Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation, by Bloom, Davis and Hess. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965, 179 pp.

Although the title is inconsistent with the concept advanced in our lead comment, this little inexpensive ($1.75) volume is recommended as a ready source of information and handbook for persons concerned with the education of the disadvantaged. The book's contents are based upon a portion of the proceedings of the Research Conference on Education and Cultural Deprivation held at the University of Chicago in June 1964. The editors have attempted to "summarize what we regard as known" concerning the disadvantaged child as it relates to the educational process. The insights are presented in summary discussion with amplifying notes in the appendix. Many specific and practical recommendations are made. The book concludes with a valuable annotated bibliography. Unfortunately, the book does not include the summary and discussion of research problems which also resulted from the Conference. This second document is as yet unpublished, but contains many ideas and questions for research workers in this field.

THE CONCEPT: "SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILD" (Cont.)

vailing "middle-class culture," there are nevertheless many different patterns of culture, reflecting more or less distinct ways of life among particular nationality, religious, ethnic, social-class, geographical and other groups within the population. They may be characterized as "sub-cultures."

Third, these sub-cultures vary in the extent to which their socializing influences (i.e., intra-family relationships, child-rearing practices, language patterns, intellectual pursuits, behavioral norms, values, outlooks, etc.) equip children to adapt successfully to the middle-class cultural patterns which prevail in the larger society. Thus, children who are socialized in sub-cultures markedly different from the prevailing culture often find themselves "disadvantaged" in social settings--first of all, the schools--where middle-class values and behavioral patterns are commonly required for success.

Finally, the common denominator of those sub-cultures whose socializing influences are largely alien to the demands of middle-class norms is poverty. The populations involved live mainly in urban and rural slums. Most of them are white. A substantial proportion of them are minority groups--especially Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, and American Indians, and in lesser degree Asians--the burden of whose poverty is aggravated by racial or ethnic discrimination.

It is mainly the children socialized in these sub-cultures of poverty and discrimination who are characterized as "socially disadvantaged." Their educational and other handicaps stem for the most part from incongruities between their sub-cultures and that which prevails in the schools and in the society generally. Their disadvantages are social in origin, resulting mainly from chronic impoverishment in an affluent society which affords limited economic security for millions of its people, and which further victimizes many of them on grounds of race.

Although large numbers of such children find it difficult to cope with conventional school tasks, this is by no means universally the case. Many of them--for reasons which available research does not fully clarify--perform quite successfully in school, even without special "compensatory" services. Thus, the useful concept "socially disadvantaged child" should not be employed as a stereotype for all children nurtured in sub-cultures of poverty and discrimination. Such children are characterized by a wide range of individual differences--in academic motivation, in learning ability, and in general patterns of behavio

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PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS (Cont.)

of kindergarten and primary school;

2) that this aspect of their handicap can be modified by exposure to a special curriculum; and

3) that the principal goal of this special curriculum should be learning how to learn.

This concern with the introduction of organized learning experiences for children prior to kindergarten is not new. Nursery schools for children from families who can afford them have been available for a great number of years, and three and four year old

children of working mothers have long been served by day care centers in many of our large cities. Even though the nursery school movement has given some attention to cognitive development, the major emphasis in these programs has been given to affective or personal-social development. The day care programs have followed the lead of the nursery schools but have tended to a custodial emphasis. What the new pre-schools add is a deliberate focus on cognitive development, concentrated primarily on the achievement of greater facility in language usage and other precursors to academic competence.

There is growing evidence to support the pre-school emphasis. Unquestionably children who grow up under differing life conditions are likely to show differing developmental patterns. Unless their experiences, though varied, have been designed to produce the same learning readiness, such readiness will vary. Consequently, it is not inappropriate to assume (and the works of Deutsch, Gray, Havighurst, Strodtbeck and others tend to confirm) that children coming from privileged homes enter school with skills and competencies different from those of children from less privileged homes. And since all of our children, despite differences present upon school entry, are increasingly required to meet common academic standards, it is argued that the disadvantaged child needs special "pre-school" enrichment or remedial experiences in order to better cope with traditional school demands.

Further support for the "pre-school" emphasis can be derived from a number of recent changes in some of the concepts underlying developmental psychology. Notable among those identified by J. McV. Hunt are the following:

First, earlier theories of fixed intelligence have been replaced by a more dynamic view in which intellectual development is seen as a product of the interaction between the individual and his environment, with the quality and timing of those interactions being crucial.

Second, similarly, despite widespread respect still being paid to Gessell's descriptive approach to child development, its underlying assumption--the pre-determined nature of development--is being rejected. Descriptions of observed behavior in children seemed to illustrate Gessell's notion of intrinsic growth patterns when observations were made on a relatively homogenous child population. Other investigators, more sensitive to differences in life conditions and in patterns of development, have advanced and demonstrated the view that life experience can influence the development not only of personal and social characteristics, and of certain anatomical structures, but that such experiences can influence functional intelligence as well.

Third, distortions of the stimulus-response theory formerly led many to view the role of the brain as that of a telephone switchboard making connections between stimuli and appropriate responses. New views suggest that brain function in problem solving should be conceived of as a more active process dependent upon a) information storage, b) logical operations to deal with this information, and c) hierarchical arrangement of these operations and memories in programs. Thus, early experiences, including preverbal experiences, are seen as important determinants of the quality and quantity of information stored, of the operations by which this information is managed, and of the arrangement of memories and operations in programs or available patterns of response.

It is the combination, then, of logical expectation, theoretical indication and em-

pirical evidence that provides much of the justification for the introduction of organized educational experience, as early as the third year of life, as a salient practice in the upgrading of educational development in disadvantaged children.

Existing pre-school programs take many forms. Like the nursery schools, after which so many are modeled, they seek to provide a warm, accepting, and supportive environment in which the child may achieve his own maximum social and intellectual development. In addition, many programs seek to provide increased exposure to those experiences which are thought to promote readiness for such academic tool tasks as reading, writing and computation. A few programs also feature experiences in which inquiry, exploration, discovery and self-expression are stressed. Among the specific techniques and procedures utilized are:

1. Parent orientation and support: Building upon the expectation, common to both parents and school, that schooling can make a difference, pre-school programs engage parents or guardians as active participants in planning, observing, and assisting school activities. (Positive expectations and readiness for involvement are more frequent among parents at this stage than after they have experienced disappointment through school-pupil failure.) Through discussion groups, the school can orient parents to the necessity for a home climate, not only emotionally conducive to learning, but provided with an adequate supply of such materials as paper, pencils, art materials, pictures, records, books, etc. Further, the school can provide coaching for parents in such skills as oral reading, listening to and with children, and guidance in handling questions and topical conversations.

2. Structured social and physical environment conducive to directed learning: In contrast to the varying degrees of order and to social and physical climates which may characterize the home environment, and which often are competitive with directed learning, these programs provide experiences which are characterized by consistency, order, purpose and structured freedom; by psychological support for exploration and experimentation; by warmth, acceptance, and self-concept support; and provide facilities which are comfortable, orderly, aesthetically and accoustically pleasing.

3. Perceptual training: Proceeding from the assumption and some evidence that disadvantaged pre-school children exhibit perceptual characteristics which are not entirely appropriate to readiness for traditional school demands, many of these programs stress training in auditory and visual attentiveness (listening and looking) and in auditory and visual discrimination (sensitivity to likeness and differences in things heard and seen). Not only is the focus placed on improving skills in these areas but stress is given to habitual dependence on these two senses for information collection. Some of these programs have developed special materials (tapes, form boards, stimulus boards, etc.); others make use of standard toys (puzzles, Lotto, blocks, etc.).

4. Development of habits toward directed learning: These habits at the three- and four-year age level primarily involve the ability to pay attention to details, to sustain such attention and to follow through on leads provided by incidental awareness or directions given. To develop such habits, some programs have developed games, systems of rewards, procedural routines, sequential activities, listening devices, pursuit tasks, and directed chores. In addition, example and social necessity are utilized to encourage the development of skills and habits in this area.

5. Improving self-concept: Many programs give attention to activities designed to develop increased self-respect and confidence. Specific activities and techniques include: still and motion pictures of the pupil, sometimes superimposed on travel and other status producing shots; reading materials, pictures and dolls which reflect the social class and ethnic origin of the pupil; classroom helpers and visitors as examples of successful persons indigenous to the pupil's background; stories, recordings, music from the indigenous background; and pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relationships which reflect respect and positive regard.

6. Language development: Activities directed at improved language usage include: structured social situations in which verbalization is essential; labeling of all objects encountered in school; opportunities for broadened experiences and contact with many of the objects, people and cultural phenomena which provide a basis for mainstream language and communication; role-play and other opportunities for language usage; audio equipment through which children hear correct speech as well as their own voices; the development of indigenous language and/or vernacular, preparatory to the improved learning of English; and parental involvement in the extension of the school's emphasis on verbalization and listening into the home.

7. Orientation to information seeking: On the assumption that many of these children have had little experience in using adults as sources of information, many programs stress situations which require the child to ask questions or in which rewards are based on verbal exploration. Some programs include activities built around question and answer games and information derived from the experience contributions of the children.

Emerging programs are being built upon experiences and judgments derived from several pilot projects for pre-kindergarten children. These programs have to date generated little hard research data. However, a number of substantive problems have been identified and work begun on a few. Among the research tasks which demand attention are:

1. The accumulation of developmental data referable to the growth and learning patterns of varied groups of children currently referred to as disadvantaged. Available research information concerning the developmental characteristics of children have been gathered primarily among those thought to be in more privileged circumstances.

2. The investigation of the relevance of given behavioral characteristics to academic readiness and educability. The fact of correlation between certain characteristics and poor school achievement is insufficient to establish a causal relationship between the two; yet it is this co-relationship which has influenced the development of compensatory programs as if the identified characteristics had been established as causative.

3. The investigation of the relative value of structured and ordered vs. unstructured and permissive learning situations; of cognitive vs. affective emphases in curriculum; and of a definite remediation vs. an assets development focus in curriculum in pre-school programs for the disadvantaged. Present practices reflect personal preference or theoretical bias. There is little empirical data to guide choice.

4. The investigation of qualities and patterns of language development and their impact on learning. What are the crucial language variables which facilitate or inhibit academic learning in disadvantaged three to six year old children--chronological variations, syntactical structure, quality of language-symbolic representation or functions served by language?

5. The testing of hypotheses derived from the theory of critical periods in development: Through experimental and longitudinal studies it would be important to determine whether certain periods are optimal or critical for certain aspects of development and if either is so, the nature of the respective developmental stages which account for the optimal or critical status of the period.

6. The investigation of the relationship between exposure to certain formal enrichment and supportive learning experiences at ages between two years and seven years and the quality of subsequent academic, social and psychological learning and adjustment.

The burgeoning interest in pre-school programs for disadvantaged children--reflected in the accompanying bibliography--is hailed generally as a salutary development, which it is. At the same time, however, there is growing recognition that such programs offer no panacea for the manifold ills of urban schools; pre-school programs are but a first step in the development of sound and adequate programs of education.

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It is apparent, however, that many readers of the BULLETIN over-estimate the capacities of the new Center, at least in its current stage of development. As a guide to educators, researchers, students and others who seek assistance from the Information Retrieval Center on the Disadvantaged, there follows a re-statement of the services available -- at the Center and through the mail.

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The Editor.